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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [KWMN](#) [XL](#)
SUBJECT: The Last of the Caribs

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Summary

[11.](#) (C) Dominica's Carib territory - one of the last vestiges of indigenous Carib culture in the Hemisphere -- is rapidly losing its cultural identity due to increasing government encroachment, the breakdown of public institutions, and the high rate of poverty and social ills within the Carib community. An almost finished village consisting of housing units and a community center has become a hot button topic in the Carib Reserve, as those in need are being denied access to the Venezuelan built complex as the Skerrit government seeks to deliver the units to local party faithful. With local control being eroded and cultural traditions fading, this last refuge of pre-Colombian culture in the Eastern Caribbean is quickly losing its identity. End Summary.

Autonomous Zone

[12.](#) (SBU) The Carib territory in Dominica is an autonomous zone designed to preserve Carib culture. The reserve is on the east coast of the country and contains roughly 3000 inhabitants, many of mixed African/Carib ancestry. The reserve is governed by a Chief who is assisted by a council of advisors, as well as a parliamentary representative. The territory has abolished private land ownership, but allows people to utilize land for housing or farming after consultation with the council. The lack of private ownership of land effectively cuts off any source of bank funding, limiting the growth of private business and forcing most Caribs to commute an hour each way to the capital to find gainful employment. The territory was the third largest provider of bananas by parish in Dominica, but has seen production plummet in recent years as preferential access to the EU market disappeared. The lack of jobs is the main contributor to social ills, which include high rates of alcoholism, domestic violence, and child abuse, according to Francis Joseph of the Christian Children's Fund. The CCF runs a program that attempts to thwart these problems by stressing mental stimulation of children under five years of age. A group of 14 roving caregivers recruited from the community they serve are given basic training in childhood development and are outfitted with an assortment of books and toys.

[13.](#) (C) The Carib territory, despite being a reserve to maintain

cultural identity, is now at risk of losing its autonomy from the federal government. The construction of a housing project funded by Venezuela has shown the limits of local authority: although the housing is almost complete, the local Carib government has not been allowed to disburse the housing to local residents; instead, as the central government in Roseau is seeking to distribute it as patronage to party supporters. According to Masclem Frederick, the Carib Chief from 1972-1975 and current advisor to the council, the territory owns all land and property in the reserve, and is considering suing the federal government for preventing its use of resources on community land.

Community Service Day Hampered by Lack of Government Support

¶4. (SBU) November 4th is a national holiday, and has been dubbed Community Service Day in order to encourage citizens to work on short-term public works projects. Throughout the reserve, individuals were busy cutting back weeds from the road shoulder, fixing potholes, and paving rough patches of the road. The projects are designed to be finished in one day and to use

community labor with resources provided by the government. Fastulus Frederick, brother of Masclem and Chief from 1975-1978, lamented the lack of funding from the government, which paid only \$20 USD to the community for its efforts. The community has become frustrated by the lack of government involvement and has ceased applying for government funds, as the previous years' requests have all been rejected. While government officials were conspicuously absent, Claudius Sanford, the opposition candidate for the district was seen helping residents on projects.

Carib Culture and Language

¶5. (SBU) The Carib language has already almost completely disappeared, with only a few elders still able to sing some songs in the language. The British anthropologist Douglas Taylor created a dictionary to preserve the language, but it is not being used in any of the schools. Prosper Paris, labeled a 'cultural treasure,' is a trainer of cultural dancing troupes and is able to sing some folk songs in the Kalinago language, but he, too, is unable to effectively communicate. In brief interviews with residents, most claimed that they could not say anything in their ancestral tongue. Paris told poloff he has seen the community become marginalized and victimized, and forced to rely on foreign assistance for education, housing, childhood development, and health.

¶6. (U) Carib Chief Garnet Joseph lamented the lack of instruction about Carib history in the local school systems. Dominicans are not taught about pre-Colombian history and have very limited knowledge about the role that Caribs have played in shaping Dominican society. As Creole Day focused on Dominican culture, almost nothing was dedicated to Carib history, language, music or food. This is denying the role that Caribs have played in the makeup of Dominica culture.

Model Village

¶7. (U) The Kalinago Barana AutC* is a Caribbean Development Bank and U.S. cultural grant-funded model village designed to highlight traditional culture, handicrafts, canoe building, cassava processing, and herbal medicine all set in structures utilizing traditional architectural techniques. The record of attracting tourists to the site has been mixed, as it is too far from the cruise terminal to easily visit on a day trip. On the main road next to the turnoff to the site is a collection of local Carib merchants selling handicrafts. Even though they could sell at a central location within the village, the low number of tourists making their way to the village convinced them to stay by the main road, where they could at least attract those on their way to the airport.

Comment

¶8. (C) The Carib territory is an important, if imperfect, attempt to preserve the traditional culture of the Carib people. Poverty, alcoholism and other social ills plague the reserve, and while the council that understands the Carib culture would be best placed to solve these ills, they are not given the support to do so from the national government. The growing trend of centralizing power in the hands of the national government and PM Skerrit is undermining whatever local autonomy is left. The almost-finished Venezuelan housing project overlooking the main road serves as a point of

contention, its new concrete construction both beckoning and taunting local residents who simply wish to improve their lot in life. It now serves as a standing reminder to the Caribs of the steady encroachment of the national government on their autonomy.
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